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C O N F I D E N T I A L BRATISLAVA 000356

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: SLOVAK DEFENSE REFORM UPDATE

REF: DAO BRATISLAVA 021320ZMAY05

Classified By: CDA Scott N. Thayer for reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

Soldiers to Deploy Overseas on Orders, Not As Volunteers

11. (U) The draft law on the state service of professional soldiers requires Slovak soldiers to deploy where they are ordered. Currently, conscripts cannot be sent abroad and only professional soldiers who volunteer may be sent out of country. Financial, career, and personal incentives continue to draw more volunteers for these deployed positions than are available. Nevertheless, the law brings Slovak military operations into line with NATO standards and prepares for the all-volunteer force, expected by the end of 2005.

Pay Reform for Military Personnel

12. (U) The military pay reform draft law introduces a new system for remuneration of soldiers according to rank and number of years served. Approximately 95 percent of a salary will be tied to rank with the remainder consisting of personal bonuses. Bonuses will reflect night shifts, work on weekends and holidays, overtime, and service readiness. Bonuses currently form 45-50 percent of a salary. The law would also raise soldiers' salaries by 4.1 percent on average and provide 67 percent higher foreign service allowances for those engaged in peacekeeping operations abroad. Rank-and-file soldiers should receive slightly over 15,000 crowns (500 USD) monthly, and officers will start at 25,000 crowns (820 USD) monthly. The salary of a general may reach more than 80,000 crowns (2600 USD) monthly. The average monthly income in Slovakia is 15,825 crowns (520 USD).

13. (C) Defense Minister Juraj Liska said pilots in active service, paratroopers, and soldiers working in special or difficult conditions or an environment harmful to health, and medical personnel will be entitled to premiums. Pilots have spoken out publicly against the reform, arguing the shift work and danger associated with their duties deserves more than the small premium they will be afforded. Privately, all 15 pilots have submitted their resignations; nine of the 15 are currently pursuing commercial pilot licenses (reftel) at the same time as the Slovak demand for commercial pilots is rising. Liska has voiced publicly a willingness to reevaluate the pilots' compensation issue.

Military Police/Civil-Military Cooperation

14. (C) Parliament approved new legislation that would remove the Military Police (MP) from the General Staff and make them responsible only to the Minister of Defense. The legislation would remove MPs from the command and control structure of the military, prevent them from supporting combat operations, and move them further away from offering Slovak MPs to NATO as a niche capability. The Director of the MPs, a military lawyer, made this proposal directly to the Parliamentary Security and Defense Committee, bypassing the civilian and military chain of command. The legislation passed all three readings quickly and under the radar screen of most observers.

15. (C) Chief of the General Staff Bulik encouraged President Gasparovic to veto the legislation (a request we quietly seconded), which he did. Security and Defense Committee Chairman Robert Kalinak (Smer) told Charge that parliament would not seek to overturn Gasparovic's veto but would craft new legislation that addressed the military's concerns.

16. (C) Foreign Policy Advisor to MOD State Secretary Fedor, Mario Nicolini, told poloff that Fedor strongly opposed the legislation. Nicolini offered that the legislation was a threat to the defense reform and circumvented the chain of command. He confirmed mission's impression that the military police are reluctant to incorporate combat duties into their areas of responsibility. Nicolini also confirmed Defense Minister Liska (SDKU) refused to take up the issue, because he wanted to avoid any potential political controversy.

Czech-Slovak Brigade Command Split in Kosovo

17. (C) MOD representatives have voiced dissatisfaction with the level of decision-making authority the Czechs allow them in the combined KFOR brigade. Consequently, both countries will increase their commitments to KFOR in order to operate

independently. The Czech and Slovak companies may remain united for political cover but will operate only loosely together on the ground. The Czechs will increase their contingent from 400 to 600. The Slovaks will provide the added number of personnel required to provide for their own logistics that the Czechs previously provided. The Slovak company will likely contract out some of the logistical needs of the company.

Special Operations Forces

18. (C) The special operations forces previously offered to NATO as a niche capability are currently working on police support for counter-terrorism operations. Nicolini said this was their secondary mission with their primary task still preparing for when they will have enough financial resources to be offered to the Alliance. Their goal is to be deployable and sustainable for six months.
THAYER

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